

WASHINGTON POST
13 April 1987

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Nixon's Warning

Confounding George Shultz's campaign to put U.S.-Soviet relations back on a rising tide, Richard M. Nixon has personally warned the secretary of state that a U.S.-Soviet summit before Mikhail Gorbachev agrees to end the war in Afghanistan would be a catastrophe for the West. President Reagan's hard-core backers fully agree with that warning but are also concerned by other aspects of Shultz's handling of the Soviet account. That is reflected by Senate GOP leader Robert Dole's revelation Friday of a top secret 1984 cable from then-ambassador Arthur Hartman in Moscow that ridiculed an effort to improve counterintelligence to stop Soviet spying in the U.S. Embassy. Dole's bombshell exploded on Shultz as he was packing to leave for Moscow.

Nixon, invited here March 26 to discuss U.S.-Soviet relations with Shultz before his trip to Moscow, described the Afghan war as the crucible in the East-West conflict. Both Pakistan and the Persian Gulf could be destabilized if the conflict continues, with the United States facing the dilemma of being forced out of that region or forced into war.

No slouch at summit politics, the

former president drew on his unique experience as architect of U.S.-Soviet détente in the 1970s. If Gorbachev comes to the political extravaganza of a summit in the United States without being pinned down to a deal on Afghanistan, Nixon said, the United States will be on exhibit as dangerously weak and incurably naive about Soviet reality. The summit drama will also numb voters to the truth, making future American actions more difficult.

Shultz listened but made no commitments. Officials familiar with his and Reagan's views say they have a private timetable. They want Shultz to sketch out an intermediate-range Euromissile agreement in Moscow for finishing touches and signing at a U.S. summit as early as July—or, if that cannot be arranged, in the fall.

They see Senate ratification of this new INF treaty during the 1988 presidential election year. That timetable would provide the president with an escape route from the Iran-contra scandal and maybe even a Nobel Peace Prize.

But Republican conservatives, worried about a post-Iran-scandal switch toward softer administration policies on Moscow, are edgy and restive.

They are moving toward an open political fight not just with Shultz, whom they long have distrusted, but perhaps with Reagan himself.

Dole's decision to go public Friday with his revelation about the Hartman cable showed just how sour this mood has grown. The cable bearing Hartman's signature was sent under a "Nodis" (no dissemination) label by a back-channel to Shultz. Although Dole said he knew only of the existence of the cable, not its exact text, we can report that the message means big trouble for the administration at a highly sensitive point in Shultz's negotiating efforts with the Kremlin.

As read by one diplomatic source, the cable lashed out at counterintelligence efforts inside the U.S. Moscow embassy as "counter-productive" and "a disgrace" to normal diplomatic procedures. The cable charged that efforts to stem anti-U.S. spying in its own embassy derived from zealots, were hurting American policy and were offending the Russians. That contradicts the conventional assumption that Soviet spies must and can be impeded.

Dole and Sen. Jesse Helms, ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, have written Shultz demanding that he turn over the confidential cable to Congress but are doubtful he will comply. Coming amid new disclosures of lax diplomatic safeguards against Soviet espionage, the Dole-Helms demand may be the harbinger of a conservative Republican attack on Shultz and his Soviet policies.

That fits Nixon's warning against a premature summit. Officials in position to know told us that Nixon carefully explained distinctions between a summit in the United States and one in Geneva or Moscow. The glitter and deluge of media coverage are pervasive in an American summit extravaganza. They build an enduring mood that a real breakthrough has been achieved and peace is in the air.

But if the United States cannot even arrange a Soviet exit from its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, Nixon warned Shultz, a breakthrough to peace is an illusion. That would give Gorbachev what he needs most: time to expand the Soviet economy and power. In return, the United States would get nothing but false hopes.

©1987, North America Syndicate, Inc.